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ABSTRACT

This paper examines changes in family day care over the past 25 years, with a focus on family day care in California. Strengths of family day care have included the feeling of intimacy, responsivity, and being part of a family; authenticity in materials and activities; the noninstitutional atmosphere; and reliance on working with parents. Family day care has provided a much needed service and is now recognized as a developmental service for children and families. The National Association for Family Child Care has become a national presence which keeps family child care issues and concerns on the national legislative agenda and which has developed an accreditation process and program. The increased professionalization of family day care has resulted in fees more representative of the real cost of care. However, recent California legislation increases the risk of landlords refusing to rent to potential family day care providers, and new federal welfare legislation threatens government supports to family day care, such as nutritional subsidies. There is also a worrisome trend toward larger family child care homes. Since the 1970s, family child care has been the focus of much research, some of which has been used as a deciding factor in funding. Researchers examining family child care should have some affinity, understanding, and authentic knowledge of family child care rather than approaching research from a center child-care perspective. A research summit could be used to discuss family child care issues and concerns. (KDFB)

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FAMILY CHILD CARE MEMORIES: ONCE MORE WITH FEELING

A keynote speech delivered at the annual Save the Children Family Child Care Conference, April 18, 1997 by June Solnit Sale

Twenty six years ago, in1971, Yolanda Torres and I wrote a report about the federally funded Pacific Oaks Community Family Day Care Project, which we directed. We said "*Our findings sold us on the potential offered by the most used, existing network of child care in the United States....family day care.*" We went on to say, "*Little has been written about family day care as it actually functions and operates, although recent studies have give us some picture from the point of view of the users of the service. Unfortunately, family day care has suffered the ravages of the press in the reporting of some of the horror stories of what has been called "concentration camp" type homes. Our findings do not bear out the bad image painted (although we acknowledge some family day care homes are poor settings for children, as are some child care centers). On the contrary, our findings show that the vast majority of family day care mothers are warm, giving women, who care deeply for the children in their care.....Indeed, the consultant family day care mothers(in our project) taught us about the viability of an existing network of child care that offers small neighborhood settings for quality care.*"

Even though that was over 26 years ago, I must say I feel the same passion for family child care when I visit a home and see, feel, smell and hear wonderful things happening for children. It is those moments when I think that every child of working parents should be able to experience that intimacy and responsiveness; the feeling of being part of a family; the ability to be comfortable and loved as is possible to find in a good family child care home. That is not to say center care cannot provide the same kind of environment. When I directed UCLA Child Care Services, our philosophy and goals were to be like a home, like family child care. It is possible to replicate the home in an institutional setting, but it is quite difficult and not natural. As Fasoli and Gonzalez-Mena have recently written about authenticity or lack of it in child care centers. "*How close to "life on the outside" is "life on the inside" of child care (centers)? How influenced are we by the kinds of packaged environments, curricula, materials, and toys available on the market? Do we understand what happens if a child never has a chance to wander, rummage around in a shed, barn, attic, basement of other clutter-gathering space? When we protect children from the real world, do we inadvertently discourage the very qualities we say we value in children: curiosity, inquisitiveness, initiative, risk taking, and persistence? What about opportunities to investigate and explore what exists in the home? Old things such as broken radios, sewing machines, screw-drivers, strips of material to make into dress-up, real kitchen bowls, spoons and stuff for concoctions....Children deserve the chance to learn firsthand about*

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their culture through playing with real things that come from their culture." In family child care it just happens naturally: play doh is not necessary if you have real dough; science lessons about steam rising are readily available in the kitchen and bath room; history is the story of the pictures on the fire place or the wall; conservation is a daily experience as the papers are sorted from the glass and the garbage; and most importantly, there is a lap to sit on, a quiet place to be comforted, a possibility to day-dream in an easy chair and to be happy, sad or pensive. The important lessons of childhood and living are readily available and don't have to be made into a lesson plan.

In the 70's, the most common name used to describe what we now call family child care was "babysitting". The names used often indicated the value placed on the service. In fact, I must say I still hear that designation. And I well remember the wise words of one of the women with whom we worked. She said: *"I'm not just a babysitter...I'm a Family Day Care Mother. A sitter comes in for an hour and you tell her what you want for your child. I decide about meals, what time they are served, what to do, when and why. In other words, I'm a substitute mother. So, I'm not a sitter!"* In 1970 these were fighting words, and that became the title of our report, "I'm Not Just a Babysitter".

Since I have been given the opportunity to reminisce, it is also important for me to remember that our project was not only research: we not only wanted to find out more about family child care, we also wanted to provide a useful service. This we did by placing students in the homes to fulfill their practicum requirements as well as to insure that providers would have the opportunity to teach and share their wisdom. The students were able to provide respite and assistance to the family child care providers as they became acquainted with the provider's routines and the children . Our project also wanted to describe the services that were being provided and to tell the world what family child care had to offer. Yes, we did have researchers from Pacific Oaks who did go to all of the homes to document the interaction of the providers, children and parents; who tracked the amount of time children spent in various activities and observed the environments in which children would often spend eight to ten hours a day. From this, we learned that most of the women with whom we worked supplied a much needed service. One that made children and parents feel loved and valued; one that was non-institutional in environment and approach; one that relied on working with parents in the best interests of the children. As I have said before, not all of the homes were wonderful...in fact a few were not good. We tried working with those providers to make things better for the children and themselves, but I cannot say we were always successful. But it is like any kind of care, there are people who do a wonderful job, those who do a horrible job and a lot in-between. However, what impressed us most was that the majority of providers wanted to do

the best they could; they were open to new ideas and wanted to make their work, their profession better for the children, families and themselves.

What we found was that most family child care providers did much more than parenting and nurturing, although that was certainly an essential and important part of the picture. It was far more than staying at home "watching" the children and TV. As I have said elsewhere, the job description for family child care might read like this : requires experience, knowledge and education that is not always readily available in colleges and universities; requires the wisdom of a parent, the knowledge of a social worker, the skills of a pediatrician, the tact of a mediator and the patience of a saint.

We've Come a Long Way

After much struggle, family child care has come a long way since those days in 1970. This is beautifully documented in *CELEBRATING THE HISTORY OF FAMILY CHILD CARE: THE LEGACY OF THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE.* It hasn't been easy, but family child care has been recognized as a developmental service for children and families. With this recognition there have come many benefits, some status, but also some difficult issues with which we must still grapple.

I would like to talk with you about some of these quite amazing accomplishments and challenges that I have noted since 1970 when I was first introduced into the field. The changes I want to discuss are in no way comprehensive: *CELEBRATING THE HISTORY OF FAMILY CHILD CARE* does that far better than I. I want to point out directions that have had far-reaching effects on the field of family child care. They are the development of a national organization, the need for adequate, stable incomes and benefits, the trend toward larger programs and the role that research plays in family child care.

Organizing on a National and Local Level

In 1970, the idea of a national family child care organization did not seem possible. Yet today family child care providers have formed their own national association, the National Association for Family Child Care.

To make this happen, required the efforts of many tireless and dedicated people who had the vision and foresight to accomplish their goal of forming a national organization. The pioneers in this movement are too numerous to mention, but a good deal of credit must go to the Children's Foundation. I hope you have great pride in the support and leadership you provided to make this a viable, vibrant organization. You had the understanding and tenacity to guarantee that there be a national presence which insures that family child care issues and concerns are raised on any national legislative

agenda. In addition, many state, and neighborhood organizations have emerged that will represent family child care to state legislators and local organizations and child-related agencies. I know how difficult it is to organize. It can be messy and full of intrigue. In most organizing efforts there usually are the "doers", the "non-doers" and the "un-doers". Yet you were able to enlist the "doers". NAFCC was a particular triumph because family child care providers often work a 10 hour plus day. Despite the long work day, the organization mobilized energetic leadership to speak out for family child care and the plight of working parents and their children in the public arena.

In addition, NAFCC has developed an accreditation procedure and program which has accredited 1,166 providers in 43 states and the District of Columbia as of last October. Still in progress is an updated accreditation program that will make this assessment program one "*that more truly reflects the values of both providers and parents....and where early childhood education concepts are being reframed into language that everyone can understand. This is an indication that the new accreditation instrument will make the process more provider and parent-friendly and more relevant, as well as define standards for high-quality child care.*" NAFCC is aiming for a January,1999 launch.

Income, Benefits and Supports

One thing that hasn't changed is that no family child care provider has made the Fortune 500 list. There are no millionaires; there are no large CEO salaries; and as far as I can observe there have been no large lay-offs or downsizing of employees working in family child care. Words like millionaires, CEOs, and downsizing are not part of the vocabulary we use with the children and their families. With the emergence and professionalization of family child care there are those policy-makers who still don't understand that family child care providers are not getting rich taking care of children. In the past, many providers were subsidizing the care of the children by charging low fees. Now that fees are more representative of the real cost of care, there are those who would like to insure that family child care is treated like a business or corporation. For example, in California a new bill was passed and signed by the governor that requires a provider to notify his/her landlord in writing 30 days prior to opening the residence for family child care; currently operating providers must have informed the landlord by March 31, 1997. This bill allows a property owner to charge a tenant operating a family child care home an increased security deposit equivalent to two to three months rent. The effect of this some of us believe will give landlords who receive prior notification to be able to discriminate against potential tenants who announce their intention to start a family child care program if they occupy

the home. Although it is against existing law to practice such discrimination, advocates say there is no way to know why a landlord chooses one tenant over another when renting a home. The California Child Care Law Center estimates that one third to one half of all family child care operates out of rental properties. This bill was sponsored by the California Apartment Association. Watch this trend .... unfortunately California has become known for setting the stage for a lot of not-so-wonderful legislation ... remember Proposition 13.

The importance of benefits, including medical, dental, hospitalization and dental programs are still not universally available to family child care providers. One dear provider friend of mine told me a few years ago that she never got sick on week-days: it was week-ends or vacation time. That was it and it isn't OK! This is an area of great concern for all of us. Preventative and supportive health care is a **must** for every one, and especially for those caring for children. This is an area in which NAFCC could play a major role.

In the 70's there were no direct subsidies of family child care, other than through income disregard, which meant that an AFDC mother could use part of her subsidy to pay for child care. There were no support services: no food and nutrition program (CACFP), no educational programs designed especially for family child care in colleges and universities and very few Resource and Referral programs who could offer support. Now there is the Child and Adult Care Food Program and many government and private agencies help low income families with subsidies that directly benefit family child care. Resource and Referral programs are now operating in every state. With new federal welfare legislation, these supports are being threatened. In fact, the idea of welfare moms providing child care for other welfare moms in their homes has again surfaced. I thought this idea had been put to rest in the 1970's when it was tried and simply didn't work. We know that it takes a lot more than being a mom and having children of your own, to provide family child care. It is reassuring that there are now national, state and local organizations that will speak out for the families and for family child care providers.

Trend toward Larger Programs

A direction that I find worrisome (and you may disagree) is the trend toward larger family child care homes. In California in the 1970's, there were few large family child care homes, caring for more than six children. Now, this is the fastest area of growth in family child care. In fact, the governor of California just signed a bill permitting small family child care homes to care for eight children providing at least two of the children are school-age and there are no more than two infants; in large family child care homes the

minimum has been changed from 12 to 14 providing there are no more than three infants. There were family child care organizations lobbying for this change; I lobbied against it. I understand the rationale for the support of this legislation, but I do question whether or not there are enough skilled and experienced family child care providers to offer the quality of care in larger home settings, we would all want for our own children and grandchildren? I also have to ask how does this differ from more institutional care, such as center care? I don't know of many homes that can accommodate an increased number of children that appears to be the direction in which we are headed. My observations of family child care is that it is best when it replicates a family, when it is personal, comfortable, relaxed and gentle. I know it is possible to provide this kind of program if the provider is experienced and has extraordinary qualities...occasionally I have seen this kind of magical happening, but not very often. The large programs I have observed that seem to be most successful are those serving school-age children; the least successful involve babies. I can only guess that the need for more income is driving this trend, although I must acknowledge that higher fees are vital for the ongoing health of family child care.

Family Child Care Research

Since the 1970's family child care has become the focus of a good deal of research. Some of it has been fine, some awful and most of it mediocre ....just the same bell curve we find in all kinds of child care. As I get older and, I hope, wiser, I find myself questioning the value of many of the research findings that have been foisted on the American public. It seems that in our country, research is often used in a punitive way. It often becomes the basis for withholding or supplying funding. Until a program has been researched by credible academic institutions and faculty, it may not be worthy of support. "Prove it" is often the battle-cry of founders. And those who are the front-line want to prove it, because we know in our hearts and bones that what we are doing is worthy. Good programs for infants and toddlers will lead to successful school success and contributing adults in the community. We also know that babies who are isolated, ignored and abused are likely to be unsuccessful in school and troubled as adults. The new brain research has verified what many of us have practiced and known for years: singing, being joyful and stimulating helps babies learn, develop and grow.

It is interesting to note that in other industrial countries, research concerning children and their care is not pursued with the same vengeance as we experience in the United States. There seems to be an assumption that children need care, they need the best care and family policy dictates that children are provided with the services they need. Research is not a deciding factor.

If you were part of a study of family child care and center care and the findings were that there was some excellent care, a lot of mediocre care and some very poor care in both settings, how would you describe the child care studied? Would you emphasized the poor care in family child care and the good care in center care? If it were a half a glass of water you were describing, would you describe it as half full? or half empty? The chances are, you would describe the findings in a way that best meets your own beliefs and values.

I am not saying that we should have no research that is or will be critical of family child care. Of course, we must improve, we must do a better job for children, their families and for ourselves. But, please, let us be sure that the research is done from the point of view of improving our work. Being critical is not enough.... in fact, it can be harmful. Perhaps we should be sure that researchers in family child care have some affinity, understanding and authentic knowledge of it. Rene Dubos has said "*Each civilization is characterized by the special kind of 'minute particulars' it elects to emphasize, and by the patterns it creates with these particulars. Societies operate on certain assumptions that influence the way they practice science and use technologies derived from it. Despite our pathetic attempt at objectivity and the assertion that practical wisdom and intellectual honesty demand that we concern ourselves with 'minute particulars', we as scientists are in fact highly subjective in the election of our activities, and we have goals in mind when we plan our work. We make a priori decisions concerning the kind of facts worth looking for; we arrange these facts according to certain patterns of thought we find congenial; and we develop them in such a manner as to promote social purposes we deem important.*" In other words, purity of purpose is not always possible.

I bring this up, because I believe that family child care research has often been conducted with center-tinted glasses. And while there is no question in my mind that we can all learn from findings that are both representative and clear in message; I am also clear that recommendations from research should keep in mind what the important characteristics and values of family child care are. Researchers should appreciate them, try to enhance them, rather than try to change them. In order for this to happen, I would like to suggest a "research summit" to discuss with researchers the concerns and issues and concerns that are alive in family child care. This would include an examination and exploration of appropriate instruments and processes for evaluation, as well as services necessary to effect positive change.

In Conclusion

In closing, I would like to thank you for giving me this opportunity to be with you, to share my passion for family child care and to reminisce about

the past. They were not glory days....probably they might be called gory days: there was much abuse dispensed to folks who were champions of family child care. However, I wouldn't trade those years for anything. I met, worked laughed and cried with wonderful folks; we worked for a better world for children, families and family child care providers; we formed a bond that will never be broken, even if we disagree; we were family for all of that. Thank you